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ABSTRACT

This report discusses homeschooling as an option for parents looking for educational choice. Keeping track of homeschoolers is difficult since many return to the public schools. Some estimates claim that in the late 1960s there were 10,000 to 15,000 homeschooled children in the U.S. By 1999, those who were homeschooled ranged in numbers from 640,000 to 958,000--about 2 percent of the school-age population. Opinion polls taken in 1985 revealed that just 16 percent of people surveyed approved of homeschooling. However, this approval rating had risen to 36 percent by 1997. Even with increased acceptance of homeschooling, opinions on homeschooling's effectiveness remain sharply divided with 43 percent believing that homeschooling contributes to raising academic standards and 50 percent believing the opposite. The rising number of homeschooled children has paralleled increasing acceptance of the practice at the state level. Homeschoolers have also been shown to be above average on standardized test scores. Public schools have increasingly reached out to the homeschool community and most colleges are now set up to evaluate and accept homeschooled students. A survey of 513 public and private higher education institutions found that only two lacked policies to critique homeschooled applicants during the 1998-99 school year. (Contains 25 references.) (RJM)

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Trends and Issues Homeschooling

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Homeschooling

By Margaret Hadderman

Homeschooling represents another option for parents—the choice to educate their children themselves, usually at home, rather than send them to public or private schools (Masters 1996). Some groups, including the Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons, have traditionally kept their younger children home, even after public schools became universally available (Lines 1995). The Amish have long trained their older children through community living rather than sending them to school.

Even today, the majority of parents who homeschool their children do so for religious reasons, basing instruction on "religious teachings, moral values, and patriotism mixed with basic skills" (Russo and Gordon 1996). A smaller group, identified as "pedagogues," use unstructured, child-centered curricular approaches modeled on reform advocates' philosophies or favor a more structured learning climate stressing "discipline, homework, individualized instruction, and patriotism."

A recent study of homeschooling rationales in a strong school-choice state (Minnesota) found that parents' reasons fell into five broad categories: educational philosophy, a child's special needs, school climate, family lifestyle/parenting philosophy, and religion and ethics (Lange and Liu 1999). Parents appeared to have multiple reasons for homeschooling that were independent of religious beliefs.

Mitchell Stevens, author of *Kingdom of Children* (2001), says "very different people are entering home schooling," compared with twenty years ago; most are worried about the quality of their children's schooling and feel they could do a better job at home. Interviews with seventy homeschooling parents around the country disclosed many individuals who were well educated, ecumenically minded, and frustrated by their children's treatment by public-school educators. They all shared a willingness to sacrifice (money, time, career advancement, and classroom space) for their children's education (Cloud and Morse 2001). Some parents felt they were forced to choose between taking care of their families and working to improve the schools—either "too far gone" or neglected by overly busy, two-income families.

The Prevalence of Homeschooling

Tracking homeschoolers can be challenging, since many eventually return to public schools. In the late 1960s, there were probably 10,000 to 15,000 homeschooled children in the United States (Lines 2001). Whereas Lines (1995) estimated that roughly half a million school-aged children were learning outside school classrooms during the midnineties, the Home School Legal Defense Association put the figure somewhere between 700,000 and 1 million (Rieseberg 1995).

A spring 1999 household survey from the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that from 640,000 to 958,000 K-12 students were in full- or part-time homeschooling—about 2 percent of the school-age population (Bielick and others 2001). Karl Bunday's examination of reports from 18 states (Learn in Freedom website)

suggests that homeschooling's annual growth rate may be slowing from 24 percent to 11 percent (Lines 2001).

According to Rieseberg, home-schooling families share some common characteristics. More than half have incomes of \$25,000 to \$55,000 and parents who have attended or graduated from college. Over 90 percent are Caucasian, and over 75 percent attend religious services. The mother teaches, and learning is flexible and individualized. Home instruction starts at age five and one-half and continues for at least four years. Children are schooled for three to four hours daily, not counting independent study time, and study many conventional subjects, particularly math, reading, and science.

Homeschooling parents generally have more children (Bielick and others 2001) and are more likely to vote regularly, contribute to political causes, correspond with elected officials, attend public meetings, and join volunteer organizations.

Public Opinion about Homeschooling

In 1985, when the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll first asked whether the homeschooling movement was a good or bad thing for the nation, 73 percent of respondents disapproved and only 16 percent approved. By September 1997, the disapproval rating had fallen to 57 percent and approval had risen to 36 percent. The September 2001 poll (Rose and Gallup 2001) shows a 54 percent disapproval rating and a 41 percent approval rating.

In the 1999 Kappan poll, respondents were asked what public-school services should be made available to homeschoolers and what standards should be applied to measure their achievement (Rose and Gallup 1999). The public enthusiastically supported provision of special-education courses for disabled children (92 percent), opportunities for homeschooling teachers to participate in teacher-development activities (80 percent), and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (74 percent) and in driver's education (73 percent). A slight majority favored provision of transportation services (53 percent).

Changing public attitudes are gradually forcing school districts to drop their "administrative inconvenience" arguments against accommodations for homeschooling families and meet parents halfway.

Fully 92 percent of the Kappan respondents say homeschoolers should "take all the state and national assessment tests that public school students are required to take." This attitude contrasts sharply with that of politically savvy groups of homeschooling parent-lobbyists, who have worked to exempt homeschoolers from state exams in some states (Golden 2000).

In the September 2001 poll, two new questions were asked about homeschooling's effects on raising national standards and encouraging good citizenship. The public is sharply divided, with 43 percent believing homeschooling contributes to raising academic standards and 50 percent believing the opposite. Similarly, 46 percent think homeschooling aids good citizenship, and 49 percent believe it does not.

The attitudes of national education organizations seem out of step with growing public support for homeschooling and formation of homeschool/public-school partnerships. The National Parent-Teacher Association opposes homeschooling, the National Education Association is pushing for vigorous regulations, and the National

Association of Elementary School Principals questions the educational effectiveness of less formal settings (Lines 1995).

Homeschooling Legalities

By 1986, after countless court battles, all fifty states "had authorized some form of home education" (Dailey 1999). According to Lines (2001), "State law generally requires homeschooling parents to file basic information with either the state or local education agency." Klicka's (1997) legal analysis indicates that states have also liberalized home teacher qualifications. Forty-one states "do not require home school parents to meet any specific requirements," and seven states require only a high school diploma or a GED. Parents do not need to be certified teachers (Lines 2001). Families are generally required to file basic information with either the state or local education agency.

The U.S. Supreme Court has not explicitly ruled on homeschooling, but has generally upheld parents' right to direct their children's education. Michigan, Kansas, and Texas have passed parental-rights acts to protect that right (Klicka 1997).

In twenty-six states, standardized testing or evaluation of homeschooled students is required (Klicka 1997). Ten states require standardized testing only; sixteen others provide an alternative to testing.

Lawsuits to secure homeschoolers' access to public-school services, including extracurricular activities, have been unsuccessful, as courts usually rule that voluntary or limited relationships with public schools are not a constitutionally protected right (Dailey 1999).

According to Dailey (1999), pursuing state legislation to create such a right (as in Idaho, Florida, Oregon, and Maine) is a more productive endeavor. Depending on the statute, homeschoolers can gain access via dual or part-time enrollment agreements, demonstrations of educational progress, or district approval. Increasingly, school leaders' claims of administrative difficulties in serving homeschoolers no longer seem persuasive when juxtaposed against opportunities to enrich a child's education (Dailey 1999).

Homeschoolers' Academic Performance and Social Development

People disagree over homeschooling's social and academic benefits. Test score data from states requiring testing or from homeschooling associations, while not totally representative, suggest that tested homeschooled children are above average (Lines 2001). According to two *Time* reporters (Cloud and Morse 2001), "the average SAT score for home schoolers in 2000 was 1100, compared with 1019 for the general population."

Ray's report shows that "home-schooled pupils who took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills outscored public school students by 37 percentile points" (Viadero, March 19, 1997). On the Stanford Achievement Test, the advantage was 30 percentile points. The longer kids had been educated at home, the better their test scores. Also, "students whose parents had teaching certificates scored only slightly higher than the children of nonteachers" (Viadero, March 19, 1997).

Results were similar in Lawrence Rudner's (1999) large-scale, noncontrolled study of 20,760 K-12 homeschoolers from 11,900 families who subscribe to Bob Jones University's Testing and Evaluation Service. Students' median scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or Tests of Achievement Proficiency (TAP) fell between the 70th and 80th percentiles. While urging caution in interpreting results (especially in light of participating families' white, middle-class demographics), Rudner concludes that a homeschool setting has proved academically beneficial for these kids. This observation holds true even though "not all home schoolers take standardized tests" and not all homeschools have well-structured curricula and dedicated parents (Cloud and Morse 2001).

Homeschooled children do not necessarily live socially isolated lives. "They may spend less time with same-aged children and more time with people of different ages" in volunteer, tutoring, and other activities (Lines 1995). According to Ray's study, they "regularly participate in an average of 5 activities outside their homes, ranging from Sunday school to sports teams." Visiting like-minded families and using available community resources, such as libraries, museums, colleges, extension courses, local businesses, mentors, and private schools, enriches children's social and intellectual development.

Homeschool/Public-School Partnerships

As state legislators, school boards, and the public become more receptive, homeschoolers are gaining access to even more resources, including public schools. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that "18 percent of children who are home-schooled enroll in school part-time; 5 percent enroll for 9 or more hours a week" (Bielick and others 2001). According to Lines (1996), "most state education agencies have a home-schooling liaison," and a growing number of school districts are offering homeschoolers access to extracurricular activities and classes on a part-time basis.

Some educators object to such access on the basis of fairness and even logistics (Hardy, August 2001). For example, opening advanced-placement and honors courses to homeschoolers could be a problem, if there are waiting lists of high-school students who have taken prerequisites and if teachers can't readily gauge homeschoolers' readiness for upperlevel classes. Closed campuses present another barrier that needs to be worked out. Regarding participation in extracurricular activities (particularly athletics), it is sometimes difficult to waive attendance and academic requirements pertaining to regularly enrolled students (Lett 1999).

Homeschool/public-school partnerships, such as an arrangement that Alaska educators pioneered, are an interesting development. In this plan, teachers in Juneau work with students in Anchorage and remote areas, communicating by phone, mail, and occasional visits. District-level partnerships have emerged in other states. In California, children may enroll in an independent-study program allowing completion of studies at home. Illinois, Iowa, Washington, Maine, and Virginia allow students to enroll part-time, if families request it (Lines 1996, Linda Jacobson 1997).

Since 1984, the Des Moines (Iowa) Public Schools have been offering a "cooperative home-based experience for parents who choose to teach their children at home" (Dahm 1996). Their Home Instruction Program serves over 310 students from 165

families—1 percent of the district's enrollment. Families have wide-ranging choices as to curricular road maps, assistance from eight full-time teachers, evaluation methods, and dual-enrollment options.

Partnerships can benefit schools by helping them open up communication lines; fulfill their educative responsibilities; gain opportunities to study effects of lay tutoring, child-led learning, and distance learning; and increase their enrollments and possible funding allocations (Pawlas 1997). Partnerships may prove vital to public schools' institutional survival, as new technologies make homeschooling and other "de-gathered" educational approaches more convenient and cost-effective (Martorella 1996).

The College Connection

Of 14.5 million U.S. undergraduates enrolled in higher education institutions in 1998, more than 200,000 are former homeschoolers—a number the National Center for Home Education estimates will grow to 1 million by 2010 (Blair, March 29, 2000b).

A survey of 513 public and private higher education institutions found that only two lacked "policies to critique homeschooled applicants during the 1998-99 school year" and that 68 percent of these policies favored homeschoolers (Blair, March 29, 2000a). Many formerly skeptical colleges and universities have even developed special admissions policies and simplified assessment processes to accommodate such applicants.

According to Christopher Klicka, many colleges used to require homeschoolers to "take a barrage of standardized tests and earn the General Educational Development credential... before applying for admission." Others required superlative SAT or ACT scores (Blair, March 29, 2000a). It is now more common (and far less discriminatory) to consider portfolios, parental transcripts, and "normal" SAT and ACT scores as legitimate assessment methods (also recommended by the National Center for Home Education).

Rebecca Talluto (2001), dean of educational services at Brevard Community College (Titusville, Florida), questions the prevailing double standard for high-school students and homeschoolers seeking dual-enrollment status at local colleges. In lieu of transcripts or a guidance counselor to verify their grade level, homeschoolers "must submit a notarized affidavit that says they are at least sophomores," and their parents must "sign a form... stating that the student meets at least minimum GPA requirements." The problem is that most parents assign their kids a GPA of 4.0, even if they say they do not keep such records.

In a similar vein, Talluto (2001) observes, regular students must meet the state's graduation requirements to attend a community college, whereas "home-schooled students need only submit a notarized affidavit stating they have fulfilled those requirements." Although Florida, Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Connecticut, Illinois, and Massachusetts have some fairly strict guidelines regarding homeschool programs, Talluto (2001) questions these regulations' effectiveness in light of her own experience. She wonders how closely superintendents or school districts are monitoring homeschoolers' progress and how many kids are "taking standardized tests at their own kitchen table." Some reevaluations of home-education controls may be in order.

In Virginia, a new college catering to homeschoolers wishing to "continue their educations within an evangelical Christian setting" was to open in fall 2001 (Blair, March

29, 2000b). According to founder Michael Farris, the mission of Patrick Henry College is to train leaders in lawmaking, business, and journalism within a Christian world view. Students will be required to obey honor codes and "corporate-casual" dress codes, get parents' permission to date, and work to earn half the needed credits for the academic majors. Neither the college nor students will be allowed to accept federal aid to defray the \$15,000 yearly tuition.

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